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ABSTRACT

In view of the fact that in the past decade parents have increasingly begun to educate their children at home, this paper aims to provide an overview of home schooling in the United States. The paper reviews the history of home schooling, describes the characteristics of families involved in home schooling, and discusses the future of home schooling in this country. While today's home schooling movement can be traced to antecedents in the alternative education and deschooling movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the primary motivation for home schoolers today is their desire to teach Christian values to their children. Characteristics of home schooling families and families that send their children to conventional schools are not very different. Concluding discussion focuses on aspects of three domains that will affect home education in the future: (1) the nature of future research on home schooling; (2) the consequences of responses of advocates of conventional schools, both public and private, to home education; and (3) what might be done to help parents provide the best education for their children if home schooling is accepted as a valid educational alternative. (RH)

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The practice of home education has undergone dramatic growth during the past decade. It has drawn the attention of the general public, educators, and policy makers. In light of these facts, the purpose of this paper is to provide a general overview of home schooling in the United States. The paper is designed to address the historical background of present day home schooling, to describe the characteristics of home-school families, and to describe several considerations regarding the future of home education in the United States.

Historical Context

The importance of parents teaching their own children has been recognized for centuries. Moses taught the commands of the Lord God to Israel and then said, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. . . . Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Bible, 1984). The nineteenth century American country school belonged to the community; the child was taught values and skills by his family and neighbors, and the " . . . child growing up in such a community could see work-family-religion-recreation-school as an organically related system of human relationships" (Tyack, 1974, p. 15). Now, a century later when the large majority of children are taught by trained and certified educators in public and private schools, a growing number of parents are opting to take into their own hands the full responsibility of educating their children in their own home schools.

Prior to the nineteenth century in America, most children were educated by parents or tutors at home (Knowles, 1988a). Common schools were organized and gained dominance during the nineteenth century. Tyack (1974) pointed out that during the nineteenth century it was well understood who controlled the schools and the education of children: the parents and the local community. By 1900, however, there was a strong sentiment among educational reformers against community control of schools. The first half of the twentieth century saw the construction of what some thought was the "one best system." As Tyack observed, however, the late 1960s saw the public education system in a crisis and the one best system under fire.

Shepherd (1986) examined the social activism of the 1960s, as well as the social tensions of the 1970s and 1980s, to establish what he perceived to be the recent roots of the resurgence of home education in the United States. As this author has previously explained (Ray, 1986), Shepherd surveyed the civil rights protest concerning Black Americans, public school busing, feminism and the ERA, the "sexual revolution" and its permissiveness, Vietnam, the narcissism of the 70s, Watergate, economic recession in the 70s, and finally a fundamental political shift in the 80s with the election to the presidency of Republican Ronald Reagan and an active "religious right." During the 60s and 70s (which included the various events just mentioned), Shepherd observed, social changes were effected and policy makers perceived schools as agents for social

change. Some people were not satisfied with conventional schools during this era and "free schools," "community schools," and "alternative schools" were begun. The New Left spoke of conventional schools and compulsory education as forms of indoctrination and social control. They desired more individual freedom and wanted to "deschool society," as Ivan Illich called it, in order to disintegrate the class structure of society.

Both Shepherd (1986) and Knowles (1988a) have posited that the present home-school movement emerged from the alternative school movement of the 1960s and 1970s; home schooling was naturally accepted as another alternative. Although home schooling in the 60s and 70s may have been primarily driven by pedagogical and social considerations, it now appears that home schools are predominantly filled with those primarily driven by ideological and moral motives (Mayberry, 1988a; Van Galen, 1988; Wartes, 1988). Based on this writer's review of the research and experience, at least 70% of home schoolers are basic, biblical Christians who are actively involved in their local churches. Even so, there are still a number of home schoolers who are pedagogically motivated or who hold beliefs which are an anathema to Christianity (Mayberry; Van Galen; Wartes). It is clear, then, that parents of disparate philosophical and religious backgrounds find themselves functioning within the same educational alternative. Mayberry (1988a, 1988b) has given close attention to this phenomenon of cleavages and commonalities amongst home schoolers.

It is apparent that a number of parents have heeded Moses' instructions, alternative schooling leaders' exhortations, and their own cognitive deliberations and have decided to home school their children in the late 1980s. There has been a move in America from a smorgasbord of schooling (which included dame schools), to the common schools and compulsory elementary school attendance in the 1800s, to 99.5% of 7- to 13-year-olds being in conventional schools taught by certified teachers in 1960 (Tyack, 1974), to the present day situation in which growing numbers of children are being taught by their mothers and fathers at home. Estimates of the numbers of children involved in home schooling vary widely. Lines (1987) estimated 120,000 to 260,000 while Feinstein (1986) reported an estimate of one million. This author has considered the home-school enrollment data from different states, home-schooling leaders' estimates of home school numbers, and populations of cities and states with respect to the national population in order to arrive at a rough estimate. A number of 400,000 home-educated children is not unreasonable, yet an actual number as large as one million would not be utterly surprising. A place on the U.S. census questionnaire where families could indicate that they home school might assist educational research and policy (P. M. Lines, personal communication, December 14, 1988).

Before going further, an operational definition of home schooling will be provided. Home schooling is here defined as a learning/teaching situation wherein children spend the majority

of the conventional school day in or near their home in lieu of attendance at a conventional institution of education; parents or guardians are the prime educators of their children. Taylor (1986a) used a definition similar to this. The operational definition reflects the fact that although this learning alternative is called "home" schooling or "home" education, the children are not necessarily only learning at home. It is common for home-schooled children to have significant interactions with adults and children outside of their immediate families. For example, Rakestraw (1987,1988) found that home-schooled children participated in religious or Sunday school activities (98.3% of the students), interaction with other home-schooled children (90%), interaction with neighborhood children (88.3%), music activities (50%), sports activities (48.3%), public or private school functions (35%), and neighborhood or community service organizations such as scouts (18.3%). Rakestraw's data corroborate those of Delahooke (1986) and Wartes (1987). Similarly, L. R. Montgomery (personal communication, January 12, 1989) has been studying the effect of home schooling on the leadership skills of the home-educated. Through her review of past research, she has found that the main predictor of leadership in adulthood is student participation in extracurricular activities. Montgomery has focused on home-schooled students who are 10 to 21 years of age. Her findings suggest that the home educated are certainly not isolated from social and group activities with other youth and adults. She has

also found that those taught at home appear to have many opportunities (and are taking advantage of them) to participate in extracurricular activities just as do those in traditional schools. Contrary to the idea that their children are socially isolated, many home-schooling parents have indicated to this author that they must often consciously force themselves to avoid the lure of getting over-involved in outside activities so that they can achieve the objectives they have for their "home" schooling.

Characteristics of Home-Schooling Families

An examination of several studies (Greene, 1984; Gustafson, 1988; Gustavsen, 1980; Knowles, 1988b; Kutter, 1987; Linden, 1983; Mayberry, 1988a, 1988b; Schemmer, 1985; Taylor, 1986a, 1986b; Wartes, 1987, 1988; Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1985) has been conducted by this author in order to describe various home school situations that exist in the United States. A synthesis yields the following major characteristics: (1) both parents are actively involved in the home school with the mother/homemaker as the teacher most of the time; (2) parents have attended or graduated from college; (3) total household income is $20,000 to $30,000 per year; (4) over 70% regularly attend religious services, with a variety of religious backgrounds being represented; (5) three children are in the family; (6) formal instruction begins at 5.5 years of age; (7) a nearly equal number of boys and girls are educated at home; (8) 70% of the youth are 9 to 12 years old; (9) the learning

program is flexible and highly individualized, involving both homemade and purchased curriculum materials; (10) children are formally "schooled" three to four hours per day, and often spend extra time in individual learning endeavors; (11) they study a wide range of conventional subjects, with an emphasis on math, reading, and science; (12) the home school is operated for more than two years; (13) home education is chosen for various reasons, including concerns for both the cognitive (e.g., to accomplish more academically and more individualized learning) and affective (e.g., to learn selected religious or philosophical values, avoid peer pressure, greater parent-child contact, and better self-concept) development of children.

This author has pointed out before (Ray, 1988a) that it is almost misleading to make generalizations about the characteristics of home schoolers. For example, although it appears that over 70% of them are Christians (be they evangelical, fundamental, or any other label one decides to apply), there are also a significant number of Mormons, New Age people, and others who claim no special religious beliefs. Likewise, although the majority may give moral/religious training as the primary reason for home schooling, these same parents also emphasize the importance of academics while other home schoolers stress academics as their main motivation.

Acknowledging that it assists critical thinking to contrast one group with another, comparisons will be made between the general United States population and the traits of the home

school "group." The United States Bureau of the Census (1985) has reported several relevant statistics. With regard to educational level, 31.9% of all adults had completed one to three years of college and 16.2% had completed four or more years in 1980. In 1984, adults had averaged 12.6 years of school. Home-school parents apparently average two or three years more of formal education. In terms of finances, the median U.S. household income in 1984 (in 1984 dollars) was $22,415, with the median for white households at $23,647. Home-school families placed in the $20,000 to $30,000 range in 1986 (in 1986 dollars). Extrapolating the U.S. 1984 median forward, it would be about $24,100 in 1986, which is comfortably within the home schooling average range. In 1984, 40% of all people 18 years or older in the general population had attended church in the last seven days. The research literature and this author's experience indicates that at least 65% of home-school families attend religious services at least weekly. The U.S. Bureau of the Census reported that in 1985 the average family consisted of 3.23 persons. The average home-school family (with two parents and three children) is probably larger than the U.S. average.

Mayberry's (1988a) study of home schoolers in Oregon delineated four characteristics which distinguished home schoolers from larger populations:

1. Home-school fathers are overrepresented in ". . . classical petty bourgeoisie or relatively autonomous occupations" (p. 34).

2. Many home-school parents are in ". . . nondenominational Protestant churches . . . or various evangelical churches" rather than in traditional religious organizations (p. 34).

3. The parents' confidence in social institutions is lower than that of the general population.

4. They ". . . lack confidence in public education and desire for less federal and state control of public schools . . ." (p. 37).

This cameo from Oregon may give a clearer glimpse into what drives home-school parents from a sociological perspective. It may be that carefully collected data like Mayberry's can then be used to generate hypotheses for testing and understanding the motivations and behavior of home schoolers.

This author has implied that the literature suggests home-school parents and families are not drastically different from most Americans. They must be different in some way, however, since they are home schoolers (e.g., Mayberry, 1988a). Despite the pluralism of home schoolers with respect to many variables, the vast majority seem to share at least one common belief. That is to say, the education of children is primarily the responsibility and the right of parents. The literature (Benson, 1981; Gustafson, 1988; Gustavsen, 1980; Knowles, 1988b; Schemmer, 1985; Taylor, 1986a, 1986b) also suggests that parents who home school their children are highly interested in and concerned

about the total education of their children. They are willing to be different and go to the extreme in parental involvement.

Another characteristic of home-schooling families is that they may face difficulties not encountered by those in conventional schools. Precisely because they are willing to be different, home-schooling parents have faced criticism and attacks from community neighbors, other family members, educators, and local school officials. Arons (1983, p. 119) reported, ". . . letters to the editors of local papers and conversations with some community leaders indicate that some people feel that home schoolers have deeply insulted the communities in which they live." Furthermore, evidently not all home-schooling parents have the support of their parents; Ballman (1987) even devoted a chapter of his book to why grandparents should support home schooling. Harris (1988), a well-known speaker and leader among home schoolers, implied in his chapter on support groups that all is not easy for home schoolers: "By hearing that others experience the same problems and frustration, as well as the same joys and sense of accomplishment, we can overcome that awful sense of isolation and loneliness. Just getting together reminds us of the common bond we share" (p. 144). Gustafson's (1988) study of a group of home schoolers (which was probably not representative of home schoolers in general) revealed that although home schoolers did not emphasize the disadvantages of home education, they did identify some. The most frequently (by 36% of the respondents) cited disadvantage

was the time commitment involved, including ". . . limited personal time for parents apart from their children" (p. 11). Other disadvantages found by Gustafson were (1) social isolation of children (mentioned by 20% of the parents), (2) the expense of home schooling (11%), (3) the lack of particular features of conventional schools (8%), (4) the disapproval of others (6%), and (5) legal problems (3%).

Unfriendly interactions with public school officials and court battles are other distinct problem areas for home schoolers. Some constitutional attorneys hold that

> The constitutional right to employ home education is protected by numerous provisions of the United States Constitution, including freedom of religious exercise, freedom of speech and philosophic belief, the right to privacy, and the right to parental liberty. The state lacks any compelling interest in prohibiting or intrusively regulating home education. Moreover, the state has not used the least burdensome means of permitting home education.
>
> Numerous recent court decisions have upheld the right to home education under these constitutional rights. The contrary cases, in the legal opinion of the authors, have been superseded or are erroneous. (Whitehead & Bird, 1984, p.117)

Nonetheless, judicial and legislative activity concerning home education has mushroomed during the 1980s (Staver, 1987). Not

all attorneys and state school officials agree that the state does not have a compelling interest in prohibiting or tightly regulating home schooling. As is true in other matters of education, the states individually adopt their own ways of controlling home education. As of December 1988, 31 states had adopted home-school statutes or regulations since 1956 (Klicka, 1988). Klicka made several other observations, including the following:

1. Three states (Iowa, Michigan, and North Dakota) require all home schools to have a certified teacher involved in the instruction at home.

2. "Higher courts in six states have recently ruled that their states' compulsory attendance statutes were unconstitutional because they were too vague . . ." (p. i).

3. Several states use terms such as regular, thorough, competent, qualified, or capable of teaching to describe how instruction or teachers should be in home schools.

4. At least 11 states allow home schools to operate as private or church schools.

5. Twenty-four states require standardized testing of home-schooled students.

The preceding list indicates that their is much diversity among state rules. Likewise, home schoolers face a wide variety of cooperation, aloofness, or harassment from public school officials (Altman, 1985; Arons, 1983; Lines, 1987; Wendel,

Konnert, & Foreman, 1986). Arons stated in 1986 that "home schooling is as much a rarity today as it was a commonplace in Colonial America. Where home schooling was once accepted and considered natural, it has since become the object of suspicion and defensiveness" (p. 87). Since the early 1980s, however, a significant amount of attention has been given to home education, and it has often made home schoolers look good in the public eye (Bolick, 1987; Boss, 1989; Divoky, 1983; Feinstein, 1986; Holt, 1983; Kohn, 1988; Merril, 1983; Moore, 1985; Ray, 1988b). Such attention may be changing the public's, and perhaps educators', perceptions of home schoolers.

In the midst of all this attention, it appears that home schoolers and many public school officials are learning to cooperate (Knowles, 1988a). Within this cooperation, home-schooled children may gain things from conventional schools that are not available to them at home, parents might learn from professional educators and vice versa, conventional schools may gain from the talents of home-schooled children, and public schools may receive tax monies due to part-time enrollment of home-schooled children. Although this cooperative scenario appears to be growing in frequency, this writer's interaction with leaders in the home-schooling movement indicates that all is certainly not well from their perspective. For example, leaders at a recent national home-school convention condemned the state of North Dakota for its repression of religious and parental liberty with respect to home education ("Resolutions,"

1988/1989). Furthermore, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is continually active in its work with home schoolers who are involved in litigation (HSLDA, 1988). In fact, it is the opinion of some (e.g., Wendel, Konnert, & Foreman, 1986) that home education litigation will not come close to desisting until a number of relevant decisions are made by this country's Supreme Court.

Home educators find themselves in a unique predicament: On the one hand, these parents are dedicated to the total education of their children; their students are doing as well or better than their conventional school peers in terms of academic achievement (Ray, 1988a); available research indicates that the children are socially and emotionally well-adjusted (Ray); they are often described in a positive fashion by the media. Conversely, home-schooling parents are not always understood or supported by their parents or relatives; communities may perceive them as too harshly criticizing current American society; home-school families face time and financial costs not associated with conventional schools; they sometimes experience harassment from local public school officials and teachers rather than assistance; some home educators and their children are still struggling through painful court battles.

In many ways, families who home school are very similar to the rest of mainstream America. Home-schooled children and conventional-schooled children are frequently found together playing baseball, worshipping God, and participating in Boy

Scouts and Girl Scouts. On the other hand, home schooling is a fast-growing (McCurdy, 1985) alternative education minority and home-school families are experiencing both rewarding endeavors and societal tribulations.

Future Considerations

The research base in home education is growing, but still relatively little is known about this modern version of an historically enduring educational alternative. Researchers, educators, and policy makers have a new and important educational phenomenon to address.

Three domains of considerations regarding the future of home education will be described. First is the general research domain. In this domain, interested researchers will continue to study the academic achievement, affective development, and psychomotor abilities of home-schooled children. Basic research will continue quite independently of quick-changing public opinion and politics. Descriptive, correlational, and causal-comparative methods will prevail. As mentioned earlier in this paper, perhaps someone will be able to reliably ascertain the number of home-schooled students in the United States. Statements will be made relating home-educated students' test scores (whether high or low) to the method that produced them, and these scores will continually be compared to scores emanating from conventional public and private schools. Researchers from historical, pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and other perspectives will develop theories and generate hypotheses to

analyze, critique, and understand various aspects of home education. This basic research will contribute to knowledge, enliven society's discourse about home education, and inform the politics and policies with respect to home schooling in the 1990s and beyond.

The second domain of considerations regarding home education is the response of conventional school advocates, both public and private, to home education. They might say, "Since we believe in our schools and what they do for children, what is it about them that home schoolers do not like and how can we attract home schoolers into our classrooms?" In a more coercive vein, some might be saying, "How can we change statutes and regulations so that home schooling is unappealing or virtually impossible to do?" With the first approach, educators will strive to evaluate their own schools, move toward an understanding of home-schooling parents and others with similar beliefs and convictions, and eventually make changes in their schools to accommodate the needs of those families who might otherwise opt for home education. This approach might help to avert hypothesized calamities such as "white flight" and the withdrawal of financial support from public education causing a drastic reduction in the quality of public schools. If some pursue the latter approach, it is this author's opinion that court litigation and legislative lobbying will increase tremendously until Supreme Court decisions deal with the matter. Furthermore, if a Supreme Court decision were perceived by home schoolers as being in great error, it is likely

that much social turbulence would continue. This latter approach of making home-school statutes or regulations highly restrictive would not be a productive route for our society.

The third domain of considerations related to home education is that of perceiving home schooling as a valid alternative in education. Much has been said during the past two decades about choices in education (Fantini, 1985; House, 1988; McCurdy, 1985). Talk about magnet schools, tuition tax credits, vouchers, and other ideas has caused some to think of the situation as the "deregulation of education." Home education is now, more than ever in a half century, one of the choices facing parents. During an appearance on National Broadcasting Company (NBC) Television (NBC, 1988), the president of the National Education Association remarked that just when the public is demanding more from public schools there seems to be a contradictory message going out to untrained, uncertified parents that they can teach their own children. In spite of her comments, the fact remains that the vast majority of states now have either specific home-school statutes or regulations or allow for home schooling one way or another (e.g., as private schools). And the numbers say that home schooling has not gone away, nor is there an indication that its popularity will disappear in the near future.

The question might be phrased like this: Is home education a valid alternative in education and, if so, what might be done to help parents do the best possible for their children-students? After all, home schoolers and their children are integral members

of society at large. It appears that society has already approved home education as legitimate, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to argue that it is educationally deficient. Assuming that the response to the first part of the question is affirmative (i.e., home education is valid), home schoolers, policy makers, and professional educators should move on to the rest of the question: What can be done to make home schooling as beneficial as possible to home-schooled students and their families? Exploratory research could be done to examine the needs of home schoolers. Researchers could delve into needs related to areas such as library materials (Gemmer, 1987), curriculum materials, athletic activities, group music, and expensive, specialized equipment (e.g., laboratory apparatus and computers), and handicapped children. Once needs are identified, work could be done to help meet the special needs of home schoolers. Other researchers might investigate parents' goals for their children (Ray, 1988a, 1988b). Further work could ascertain whether parents' goals are being achieved (Ray, 1988a, 1988b) and determine the effects of the hidden and formal curricula (Van Galen, 1988) on home-schooled children. Longitudinal studies are appropriate in this area of understanding parents' goals and evaluating the achievement of goals via home education. If it is found that home educators' goals are not being met, work could be done to assist them in their future efforts. Researchers might also evaluate parents' goals. If educators perceive problems inherent to parents'

goals, efforts might be made to inform home educators and alter their goals.

Summary

The population of home-educated students in the United States is large enough to warrant serious attention from researchers, educators, public school officials, politicians, and other public servants. Although home education has a longstanding worldwide history, and likewise in America, it has just recently experienced a strong resurgence in the United States. The origins of some of today's home schoolers are the alternative education movement and the unschooling or deschooling of the 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, it appears that the primary motivating factor for home schoolers today is related to their desire to teach Christian values to their children. This primary impetus, however, is mixed with other motivations such as strong academics.

The characteristics of home-school families and those who participate in conventional schools are not drastically different. Some differences do appear in family composition, educational background of parents, and their religiosity. Other generalizations about home schoolers are specific to them as a subpopulation of the United States.

The research body on home education is young and limited, but growing at a rapid rate. Three considerations should be given to future study of home education. One is the fact that research in general will continue from a broad range of academic

perspectives. Second, advocates of conventional schools should carefully examine and plan constructive responses to home schooling. Third, if home education is considered a valid alternative in education, various responsible groups should contemplate how to ensure that the educational and familial needs of home schoolers are adequately met.

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